

## Atsikana amakono

(A day or night mask from the Mua area)



(day)



(night)

### Themes

- 1) HIV/AIDS & sexual diseases
- 2) Modesty
- 3) Promiscuity

### Etymology

**Atsikana amakono** means, 'the young girls of our days'.

### Description

The character of **Atsikana amakono** performs at the night vigils of funerals, commemoration rites and initiation ceremonies. It rarely appears during daytime. The night costume consists of a head cover

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made of palm leaves forming a cone hat concealing the dancer's head. The leaves are tied at the apex and linked with other palm leaves woven into a zigzag pattern. More palm bangles appear on the arms and the legs, from the shoulders to the ankles. This palm material reflects the light at night, even in the darkest conditions. The dancer wears a construction in the shape of a mini barrel with no top and no bottom. This construction acts as a skirt and is made of elephant grass attached to a bamboo frame, decorated with woven palm leaves which form a zigzag pattern. The skirt-like garment covers the body from the waist to the middle of the thighs: it is held in place with a pair of palm suspenders that criss-cross the dancer's chest and pass over his shoulders. The dancer carries two mini handkerchiefs. As he moves around the arena, his feet and arms follow the rhythm of the *chisamba*, and he waves his handkerchief elegantly. The day mask (25 cm.) resembles that of Mariya and wears a blouse and a miniskirt. The male choir explains: "*The young girls of our days put on short skirts.*"

The night character is ancient and precedes the introduction of miniskirts. It provides a lesson in modesty. **Atsikana amakono** criticises the new generation that does not show respect for the dress code. It wears provocative clothing that might promote promiscuous behaviour. The spirit world manifests concern in even such apparently trivial matters as the dress code. Modesty for both men and women is highly valued and a significant teaching, particularly as one approaches rites associated with puberty. Immodesty is viewed by the Chewa as an invitation to promiscuity and to sexual diseases.

### **Song**

*"Atsikana amakono makono, nsalu za m'manja."*

### **Source**

Interviews in 1990 and 1992